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ABSTRACT

Censorship efforts are taking place throughout the country in spite of greater activism among anticensorship forces. One of the alarming trends is that many of the censors are now attacking the curriculum of the schools, challenging textbooks in reading, literature, history, science, health, and social studies. The International Reading Association has developed a censorship statement which very clearly states that any type of censorship infringes upon the freedom of speech, thought, and inquiry guaranteed in the first Amendment of the United States Constitution. Schools should develop procedures for dealing with book challenges, and should also adopt procedures to support teachers who wish to implement broad literature-based programs in their reading curriculum. Parents will need to be informed and teachers will need to be careful not to use trade books that have not been adopted through the regular adoption routine. (A list of sources of information concerning censorship is included.) (MM)

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Intellectual Freedom: The Censorship War Continues

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This year, as each year since 1979, censorship in public schools increased again. These censorship efforts are taking place throughout the country in spite of greater activism among anticensorship forces. One of the alarming trends is that many of the censors are now attacking the curriculum of the schools, challenging textbooks in reading, literature, history, science, health, and social studies. Another troubling aspect to this increase in censorship attempts is that there has been a parallel increase in successful restrictions or bannings.

Just over a year ago in Lolo, Montana, a small, vocal group of parents began to challenge courses and programs integral to the school curriculum. This group of parents has caused the school board to acquiesce to the following: adoption of a *Phonics First* set of textbooks instead of books wanted by teachers, halting of team teaching in middle schools (promotion of communism), and banning the teachers' use of student writing journals.

In its largest context, intellectual freedom is freedom of expression which includes, by virtue of the First Amendment, freedom of speech, freedom to read, freedom of press, artistic freedom, and academic freedom, the right to privacy, and other associated personal liberties (Busha, 1977).

Librarians use the term "intellectual freedom" as the antithesis of censorship (Busha, 1977). This becomes particularly evident in schools where pressures from public officials, teachers, taxpayers and parents arise. Censorship in public schools is a social fact, a reflection of social order in which some groups seek to impose a set of moral rules on others (Davies, 1978).

In Texas, the Gablers of Longview, Texas, operate through their organization Educational Research Analysts, which disseminates "textbook reviews." They have had quite a bit of success using the state textbook adoption process in Texas. Other organizations such as Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum and Pat Robertson's National Legal Foundation are funding lawsuits in Tennessee and Alabama. One

particularly active group is Citizens for Excellence in Education (CEE). This group has set as its goal "bringing public education back under the control of Christians." Generally, the motives of censors are sincere. They feel the material challenged will offend readers, corrupt children and undermine family or Christian values. They can recognize "evil" and feel that they must protect others from this "evil."

IRA, in 1985, developed a censorship statement which very clearly states that any type of censorship infringes upon the freedom of speech, thought, and inquiry as guaranteed in the first Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. The IRA Censorship Statement is as follows:

The International Reading Association supports freedom of speech, thought and inquiry as guaranteed in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. Censorship infringes upon that freedom by denying individuals the right to select what they read and by limiting access to alternative points of view. Free inquiry is necessary to a democratic society.

In the spirit of freedom, members of the International Reading Association are committed to advancing reading comprehension and literacy at all ages and stages. Reading comprehension must go beyond literal understanding, to interpretation and evaluation of what is read. The First Amendment makes this critical perspective possible by permitting the publication of materials which represent diverse points of view. Helping students to develop this critical perspective, however, requires an enlightened educational program, with curricula that provide for:

- (1) freedom to choose from a rich choice of classroom and library materials dealing objectively with many facets of a diverse society;
- (2) freedom to discuss issues identified by such reading; and
- (3) freedom to defend collective and individual positions against challenges from groups and individuals with different points of view.

IRA supports the rights of parents to monitor the materials that their chil-

dren are required to read, and IRA believes that no student should be forced to read material which he or she finds morally offensive. IRA further believes, however, that formal channels should be established for handling criticisms of school materials, and that parents and others should use these channels when filing a complaint.

Many communities and institutions have found that the best defense against censorship comes from developing procedures for dealing with challenges before challenges actually occur. The use of standard procedures for text selection is essential for answering challenges of materials and for maintaining the right of students to select what they read. Such standard procedures should set forth policies for book selection in academic libraries and classrooms.

The determination of normal procedures for text selection should include development of the following.

- (1) There should be policies for the selection of printed materials. These policies should be developed with input from community groups, including teachers, students, parents and civic leaders. Policies must be written and approved by appropriate governing bodies (board of directors, trustees, etc.)
- (2) There should be written guidelines for identifying and handling complaints.
- (3) There should be a system for openly communicating with civic, religious, educational and political bodies in the community.
- (4) There should be systematic methods for disseminating positive information about intellectual freedom through newspapers, radio and television.

Members of the International Reading Association must determine whether guidelines and procedures for selecting materials and answering challenges exist in their agencies and schools. If such guidelines do not exist, members should push for their adoption. These guidelines and procedures allow the school system to respond in a careful, considered manner to chal-

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lenges against materials used in the schools. This can provide insurance against incidents which may inflame a community and endanger academic freedom. (The Reading Teacher, October 1985, pp. 52-53)

In addition to developing procedures for dealing with book challenges, schools may also wish to adopt procedures to support teachers who wish to implement broad literature-based programs in their reading curriculum. With the movement in many school districts toward a whole language philosophy, many teachers are using a variety of trade books in addition to or in lieu of the basal readers in their reading programs.

As teachers make decisions to change their reading programs, will challenges surface from parents and administrators? Parents will need to be informed and teachers will need to be careful not to use trade books that haven't been adopted through the regular adoption routine. Again, no student should be forced to read a book that s/he or his/her parents finds offensive.

This concern is raised so that teachers who choose a different reading program can take the necessary steps to protect

themselves and their school districts from attacks.

Since reading and content materials, library books, and teaching techniques and strategies are at issue, we need to ask ourselves a question. Should the view of a particular segment of society be allowed to dictate the materials that will be purchased with all of the taxpayers' money or the reading program that will be used in a school or district?

There are many resources available to educators who want to maintain intellectual freedom in their school districts. Here are a few suggestions for sources of information, packets of materials, and lists of speakers:

Texas Library Association
3355 Bee Cave Road #603
Austin, Texas 78724
(Ask for their *Intellectual Freedom Handbook*)

The National Coalition Against Censorship
132 W. 43rd Street
New York, New York 10036
(Ask for their *Books on Trail*)

American Civil Liberties Union
22 E. 40th Street
New York, New York 10016

National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road
Urbana, Illinois 6181

IRA
Intellectual Freedom Committee
800 Barksdale Road, P.O. Box 8139
Newark, Delaware 19714-8139

The American Library Association
Intellectual Freedom Committee
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611

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- Busha, G.F. (1977). *An intellectual freedom primer*. Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.
- Dhavan, R., & Davies, C. (1978). *Censorship and obscenity*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield.
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